

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 IO-10 EUR-12 /082 W

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R 080600Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2623

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 1534

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, VS

SUBJECT: CAO DAI DEVELOPMENTS

REF: STATE 24908

1. SUMMARY: THE FALL OF PHUOC BINH AND BA DEN MOUNTAIN  
OUTPOST LED TO GRADUALLY INCREASING SPECULATION CONCERNING POLITICAL  
INCLINATION OF CAO DAI RELIGIOUS SECT. CAO DAI LEADERS EARLIER  
THIS YEAR ISSUED INTERNATIONAL APPEAL FOR PEACE AND ALSO RE-  
QUESTED GVN PERMISSION TO MEET WITH VIET CONG TO PRESENT PETITION  
CALLING FOR A CEASEFIRE IN TAY NINH PROVINCE. IT MID-JANUARY  
MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER KHI, CAO DAI LEADERSHIP INDICATED  
THAT WHILE THEY DID NOT OPPOSE THE GVN THEY WOULD NOT TAKE ANY  
ROLE TO STRENGTHEN THE GVN. ACTING POPE TRUONG HUU DUC HOWEVER,  
HAS TOLD TAY NINH PROVINCE CHIEF THAT CAO DAI INITIATIVES ARE  
MERELY AN EFFORT TO PROTECT THE HOLY SEE AND ARE NOT INDICATIONS  
THAT THE CHURCH IS TURNING AGAINST THE GVN. PROVINCE CHIEF HIMSELF  
SEES NO EVIDENCE OF CHANGE SINCE THE APPEAL IN THE ATTITUDE  
OR ACTION OF THE CAO DAI POPULATION OR CAO DAI MEMBERS IN THE  
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TERRITORIAL FORCES. LONGSTANDING "PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE" POLICY

OF FORMER POPE HAS SURFACED IN CONNECTION WITH CAO DAI CARDINAL HO TAN KHOS'S CONTACTS WITH COSVN. CAREFULLY GUARDED WORDS OF THE CHURCH SEEM RARELY TO HAVE HAD IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCE ON LOYALTIES OF CAO DAI POPULACE OR ITS WILLINGNESS TO BEAR ARMS IN DEFENSE AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS. GROWING NVA PRESSURE, HOWEVER, MUST INEVITABLY CONTRIBUTE TO INCREASINGLY TENSE ATMOSPHERE IN TAY NINH CITY WHERE FOLLOWING COMMUNIST SHELLINGS MUCH OF POPULATION HAS DEPARTED THE AREA NEAR PROVINCIAL HEADQUARTERS. WE DO NOT CONSIDER THAT APPARENT MOVES TOWARD NEUTRALISM BY CAO DAI CHURCH LEADERS REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM FOR THE SUCCESSFUL DEFENS OF TAY NINH AGAINST NVA EXPECTED ATTACK. END SUMMARY.

2. AS REQUESTED REFTTEL FOLLOWING IS OUR ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANT RECENT CAO DAI ACTIVITIES.

3. SINCE THE FALL OF PHUOC LONG PROVINCE AND SPECIFICALLY SINCE THE LOSS OF THE OUTPOST ATOP BA DEN MOUNTAIN OUTSIDE TAY NINH CITY ON JANUARY 7, THERE HAS BEEN GRADUALLY INCREASING SPECULATION CONCERNING THE POLITICAL INCLINATION OF THE CAO DAI RELIGIOUS SECT.

4. SHORTLY AFTER THE ABOVE MILITARY REVERSES THE HOLY SEE OF THE CAO DAI SECT ISSUED AN APPEAL FOR PEACE TO VARIOUS INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITIES (SAIGON 0820). CAO DAI LEADERS ALSO REQUESTED GVN PERMISSION TO MEET WITH THE VIET CONG DELEGATION AT TAN SON NHUT TO PRESENT A PETITION CALLING FOR A CEASEFIRE IN TAY NINH PROVINCE. THE PETITION, MADE PUBLIC AT A JANUARY 16 PREZE CONFERENCE, ASKED THAT THE GVN AND COMMUNISTS MEET IN CAO DAI HOLY SEE TO NEGOTIATE A PROVINCIAL CEASEFIRE. SHOULD USCH NEGOTIATIWNFUDU BWMHXUCCESSFUL AND FIGHTING RESUME, THE CAO DAI REQUESTED THAT THE HOLY SEE BE CONSIDERED A "NON-COMBAT ZONE" (KHONG CO DANH). SHOULD A CEASEFIRE BE AGREED UPON IN TAY NINH, THE CAO DAI OFFERED TO MEDIATE A NATIONWIDE SETTLEMENT.

5. EMBASSY SOURCES INDICATE THAT CAO DAI LEADERS, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH PRIME MINISTER KHIEM IN MID-JANUARY, EXPLAINED THAT WHILE THEY DID NOT OPPOSE THE GVN THEY WOULD NOT TAKE ANY ROLE TO STRENGTHEN THE GVN. THEY WISHED THE PRIME MINISTER TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE CAO DAI ARE NOT COOPERATING WITH THE COMMUNISTS OR  
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ACTING AS THEIR PAWNS, BUT MUST MAKE THEIR POSITION KNOWN TO BOTH SIDES IN HOPES OF A RECONSILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO. IF THE CAO DAI ATTEMPT IS UNSUCCESSFUL, THEY SAID, THEY MUST LIVE WITH THE PRESENT CONDITIONS BECAUSE IT IS AGAINST THEIR ETHICS TO USE FORCE TO ACHIEVE THEIR ABJECTIVES.

6. IN RESONSE TO CAO DAI LEADERS' POLITICAL ACTIVITY, PRESIDENT THEIU ORDERED ARVN 25TH DIVISION TO RETAKE LOST GVN BASE ATOP BA

DEN MOUNTAIN. FOLLOWING A TWO-DAY BATTLE, INITIAL OPERATION WAS CALLED OFF JANUARY 24 BUT OBJECTIVE HAS NOT BEEN ABANDONED BY GVN FORCES.

7. TAY NINH PROVINCE CHIEF, COLONEL TRAN VAN TY, ON JANUARY 23 TOLD CONGEN BIEN HOA THAT WHEN HE LEARNED OF THE CAO DAI PEACE APPEAL HE MET IMMEDIATELY WITH ACTING POPE TRUONG HUU DUC WHO TOLD HIM THAT THE INITIATIVE WAS MERELY AN EFFORT TO PROTECT THE HOLY SEE AND DID NOT MEAN THAT THE CAO DAI WERE ASKING PEOPLE TO BE NEUTRAL IN THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GVN AND COMMUNISTS OR THAT THE CHURCH WAS TURNING AGAINST THE GVN. COLONEL TY HIMSELF SEES NO EVIDENCE OF ANY CHANGE SINCE THE APPEAL IN THE ATTITUDE OR ACTION OF THE CAO DAI IN GENERAL OR OF CAO DAI MEMBERS OF THE TERRITORIAL FORCES. TY IS, HOWEVER, ATTEMPTING TO LIMIT DISTRIBUTION OF A CAO DAI MAP OF THE "NON-COMBAT HOLY LAND" AS HE BELIEVES THEM TO BE AN UNSETTLING ELEMENT IN THE TENSE ENVIRONMENT OF TAY NINH CITY.

8. COL TY EMPHASIZED THAT THE PROCLAMATION CALLS FOR THE HOLY LAND TO BE "NO FIGHT" (KHONG CO DANH) RATHER THAN "NEUTRAL" (TRUNG LAP) AREA. TY SAID HE THOUGHT THE DIFFERENCE WAS A STUDIED ONE, SIGNIFYING THAT THE CAO DAI ARE NOT ALTERING THEIR PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH AND ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GVN BUT RATHER ARE SEEKING MERELY TO PROTECT THE CAO DAI CATHEDRAL AND HOLY SEE. THUS CONGEN BIEN HOA NOTES, IN OUR USAGE, THE CORRECT TERM WOULD PROBABLY BE "OPEN" OR "NON-COMBAT" RATHER THAN "NEUTRAL" AREA. IT SHOULD BE RECALLED THAT THE HOLY SEE HAS SURVIVED TWO PREVIOUS SERIOUS ATTACKS (IN 1968 AND 1972) AND HAS EXPERIENCED NO SIGNIFICANT DEFECTIONS OF THE CAO DAI POPULATION.

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ACTION EA-10

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R 080600Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2624

INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA  
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CINCPAC HONOLULU HI  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAIGON 1534

9. MUCH HAS BEEN MADE RECENTLY OF THE PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE POLICY ANNOUNCED BY POPE PHAM CONG TAC 18 YEARS AGO. CONGEN OFF BIEN HOA WAS TOLD BY TANY NINH SOCIAL WELFARE CHIEF BUI DAT CHUONG THAT CAO DAI CHURCH HISTORIAN LE QUANG TAN MET RECENTLY IN NEW DELHI WITH DRVN AMBASSADOR TO INDIA AT A WHICH TIME DRVN AGREEMENT WAS ALLEGEDLY GIVEN TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEUTRAL ZONE INCLUDING BA DEN MOUNTAIN. CHUONG NOTED THAT THE NEUTRALIST POLITICAL POSITION OF THE CAO DAI WAS A POLICY ALMOST TWENTY YEARS OLD AND THAT THE NON-COMBAT ZONES PROPOSZO AT THIS TIME WAS ONLY A LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE DEVELOPING FROM THIS POSITION. HE ADDED THAT, WHILE CHURCH POSITION MIGHT AFFECT LONG-TERM ATTITUDES OF LOCAL CAO DAI POPULATION, FOR THE PRESENT THE CAO DAI PEOPLE, AS CITIZENS OF THE GVN, WOULD FULFILL THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO THE RVN, AND THAT CAO DAI SOLDIERS WOULD REMAIN LOYAL TO THE GVN.

10. THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED REPORTS THAT CAO DAI CONSERVATOR CARDINAL HO TAN KHOJUN WHO HAS A LONG HISTORY OF CONTACTS WITH THE COMMUNISTS, HAS BEEN RECEIVING MESSAGES FROM HIS CONTACTS AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE FOR SOUTH VIETNAM (COSVN). THESE CONTACTS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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PRIMARILY FORMER CAO DAI OFFICIALS WHO FOLLOWED FORMER CAO DAI POPE PHAM CON TAC INTO EXILE INTO CAMBODIA IN THE 1950'S AND HAVE NOW

ATTACHED THEMSELVES TO COSVN. COSVN APPARENTLY REQUESTED KHOA TO BRING PRESSURE ON THE SACERDOTAL COUNCIL TO PROTEST THE STATIONING OF GVN FORCES WITHIN THE HOLY LAND. WHEN THE COUNCIL FAILED TO TAKE ACTION, COSVN THREATENED THAT VC FORCES WOULD ATTACK INTO THE HOLY LAND, INFLECTING CASUALTIES AND CAUSING DAMAGE TO THE HOLY SEE. THE VC DID INDEED LAUNCH ATTACKS IN TAY NINH PROVINCE IN LATE 1974 BUT NOT IN THE HOLY LAND. IN APPROXIMATELY MID-DECENNER 1974, KHOA REPORTEDLY RECEIVED A SECRET MESSAGE FROM NESVN PROPOSING IN AN OBVIOUS MANEUVER TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN THE CAO DAI AND GVN, THAT THE SACERDOTAL COUNCIL ADJUST ITS POLICY TO THE LINE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND THAT THE COUNCIL INSIST THAT THE GVN AGREE TO MAKE TAY NINH A NEUTRAL PROVINCE WHERE PEACE TALKS COULD TAKE PLACE BETWEEN THE VC AND GVN.

11. COMMENT: THE FOREGOING IDDCATES THAT LONGSTANDING INCLINATION OF CAO DAI CHURCH LEADERS TO ATTEMPT TO MAINTAIN A NEUTRAL

POSTURE BETWEEN GVN AND COMMUNISTS ONCE AGAIN IS ASSERTING  
ITSELF AND THAT LONGSTANDING ADVOCATE OF THIS POLICY, HO TAN KHOA,  
IS PLAYING A ROLE THEREIN. THIS IS NO DOUBT A REACTION TO  
THE LOSS OF PHUOC LONG PROVINCE AND OF BA DEN MOUNTAIN OUTPOST AS  
WELL  
AS GROWING MILITARY PRESSURES ON TAY NINH CITY. INEVITABLY,  
THEY WERE CONCERN ABOUT AN APPARENTLY DECLINING US COMMITMENT

IN VIETNAM HAS ALSO PLAYED A PART IN CAO DAI CALCULATIONS. HISTORICAL  
LY,  
THE CAO DAI HAVE TRIMMED THE PUBLIC SAILS TO SUIT THEIR PERCEPTION OF  
THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE TWO SIDES. AS INDICATED ABOVE, THEY  
HAVE PROFESSED A GENERAL POLICY OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE FOR MANY  
YEARS AND TOO MUCH SHOULD NOT BE MADE OF THEIR MOST RECENT STATE-  
MENTS. MOREOVER, THE CAREFULLY GUARDED WORDS OF THE CHURCH SEEM  
RARELY TO HAVE AFFECTED THE LOYALTIES OF THE CAO DAI POPULATION  
OR ITS WILLINGNESS TO BEAR ARMS AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS AND WE  
BELIEVE THE JUDGEMENT OF BUI DAT CHUONG THAT SHORT-RUN LOYALTIES OF  
LOCAL POPULATION WILL PROBABLY NOT BE AFFECTED SIGNIFICANTLY BY  
CURRENT CHURCH PROPOSALS IS A CORRECT ONE. ON THE OTHER HAND,  
GROWING NVA PRESSURE AND RECENT NVA SHELLING OF THE CITY MUST  
INEVITABLY CONTRIBUTE TO THE TENSE ATMOSPHERE EVIDENCED BY  
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REPORTS FROM TAY NINH CITY TO THE EFFECT THAT MUCH OF THE POPULATION  
HAS DEPARTED THE AREA NEAR PROVINCIAL HEADQUARTERS. IN SUM, THIS  
ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE POLITICAL MANEUVERING ON THE PART OF SOME

CAO DAI LEADERS AND SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS AN INDICATION OF  
ATTITUDE OF THE GENERAL POPULACE. PRIOR ATTACKS ON TAY NINH HAVE  
REVEALED STRONG WILL TO RESIST COMMUNIST TAKE OVER ON PART OF CAO  
DAI PEOPLE. IN ADDITION, THE GVN AUTHORITIES HAVE HANDLED RECENT  
CAO DAI ACTIVITIES WITH CONSIDERABLE SKILL AND DELICACY. THUS,  
WE DO NOT CONSIDER THAT APPARENT MOVES TOWARD NEUTRALISM BY SOME OF  
CAO DAI LEADERSHIP REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM FOR THE SUCCESS-  
FUL DEFENSE OF TAY NINH AGAINST NVA ATTACK.  
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## Message Attributes

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